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ABSTRACT

Intended for newspaper managing editors, this collection includes the following topics and authors: (1) discovering how to reshape newspapers for the video age (Tom Holbein and Deanne Termini); (2) trends that will cause newspapers to change the manner of news collecting and delivery (Tom B. Mauro); (3) solid tips on research (Jenny Fielder); (4) what editors need to know from readership research (Michael Burgoon and Judy K. Burgoon); (5) a cautious approach to redesigning the newspaper (Jane Amori); (6) the use of a journalism quarterly for editors (George E. French); and (7) a survey of the reading habits of managing editors. (EL)

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Research — Where Do We Go From Here?

Who Are We Aiming For?

Readership & Research Committee
Associated Press Managing Editors
Nov. 14, 1983
Louisville

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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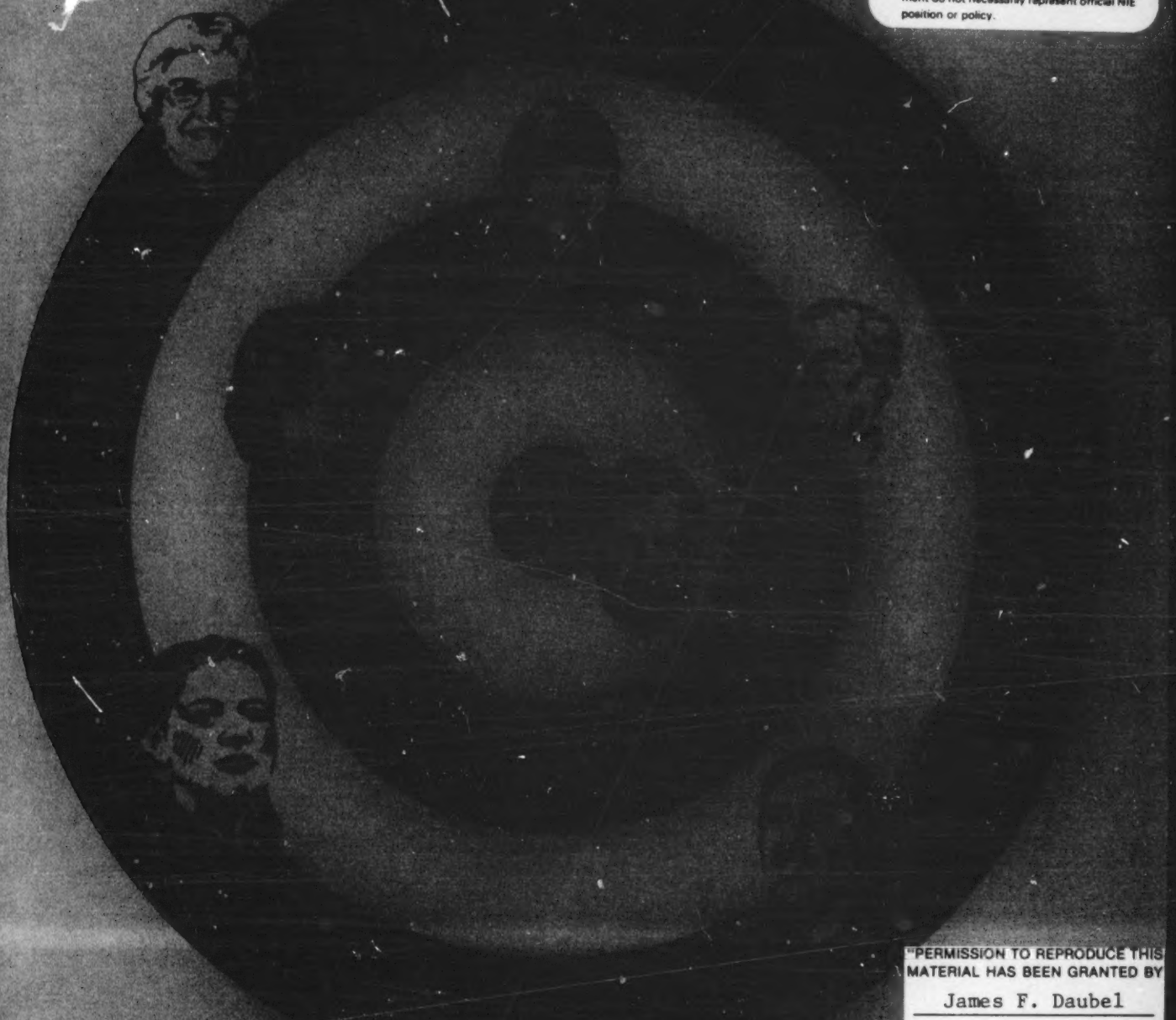

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Editors and the 'blip culture'

Discovering how to reshape newspapers for the video age

By Tom Holbein
Executive Vice President, Belden Associates
And Deanne Termini
Senior Vice President, Belden Associates

What should researchers research next?

● **Where do newspapers fit in the information explosion?**

What is the relationship between a newspaper and a companion videotex system?

What changes are indicated? We are increasingly living in a blip culture, in which people don't absorb media in a linear, front-to-back-of-the-paper way. Newspapers need to find a way to help readers through the information wilderness. There are growing numbers of people interested only in the gist of a story.

City by city studies should be made relating the local newspaper to the other local media — all news radio, television news, cable, videotex. Studies should focus on local differences.

> Readers continue to criticize newspapers for too much bad news and not enough good.

● **Design and content of the front page and what the function of the front page should be.** More and more papers are making it a window to the inside and not just a display of the day's best stories. Readers seem to like a dual role.

● **How well does the newspaper represents its community?** Do the local image and perspectives of the community come across? Does a reader develop a feel of the local personality?

● **The balance of the newspaper.** Readers continue to criticize newspapers for too much bad news and not enough good. Newspapers try for better balance but need to keep evaluating that. We've seen the image of papers with readers change by switching the balance.

Holbein says one of the strengths of USA Today is that they are effectively serving the blip culture. One of its weaknesses is that it offers no local identity, or image.

> Recognize that you are serving a fickle audience that often only wants the gist of a story.

What should editors focus on?

● **Make the paper more functional.** Summarize. Use more indexes. Anchor features, sections, etc. Recognize that you are serving a fickle audience that often only wants the gist of a story.

● **Be more visual.** Make better use of color and graphics. Use more maps and charts. Readers love USA Today because of its graphics and they think it is more timely and more current. It looks more like TV news and they associate TV with timeliness.

● **Make Page 1 more diverse and better balanced.**

● **Localize.** Give the reader more local news and more localized news. Readers look for content that affects them in national and international stories, so localize or personalize them.

● **Put more emphasis on personal business topics.** Make business coverage more applicable to all readers.

> Readers react positively, particularly to stories that try to help people in hard times.

● **Provide more information on entertainment and activities people can participate in.** Research shows newspapers don't only feast on news.

● **Pay more attention to home computers and related coverage.**

● **Be fair.** Readers feel there is a bias in papers, that papers are not always fair, that they don't always present both sides.

● **Offer more human interest stories.** Readers react positively, particularly to stories that try to help people in hard times. They see this as uplifting. It helps the image of the paper. The paper becomes a protagonist, not an antagonist.

Also, readers like to see stories about "regular" people, ordinary folks.

Changing with the times

News priority: keeping up with the Joneses, Smiths, Johnsons . . .

By John B. Mauro
Director of Research, Media General

In my opinion there are several areas of concern to newspapers now, and they will persist to be for the next several years. And, as interest in research continues, the following trends and behaviors will become more evident to many more editors and publishers.

Although little can be done by any individual newspaper to offset external changes which have taken place during the past several decades, more acute recognition of these changes will cause newspapers individually to change the manner of news collecting and delivery. I refer to such trends as the move to the suburbs; changing makeup and size of households; decline in civic spirit; increased distrust of the press; personal mobility; changes in the communication environment, and difficulty of reading.

Newspapers will be more acutely attuned to these changes than they have been and likely will try to alter those that can be altered. I speak here of the difficulty of reading as one example. Society itself is beginning to turn this one around.

- Newspapers, I believe, will put more emphasis in the population's strength of motives to be informed; will adjust editorial and managerial thinking in the direction of those motives.
- I think that following this more emphasis will be placed upon attitudes toward newspaper reading in terms of satisfaction with the newspaper regarding credibility, balanced of reporting, accuracy, appearance, citizenship and the like.
- There will be a greater concern for content preferences in terms of geography and subject: While advertisers expect geograhic segmentation of newspaper audience for targeting advertising, readers expect just the opposite. They will not be satisfied with only local news. The dilemma between advertiser and reader is likely to be solved once advertisers become convinced of the power of newspaper advertising to select prospects regardless of geographic boundaries.

The dilemma between advertiser and reader is likely to be solved once advertisers become convinced of the power of newspaper advertising to select prospects regardless of geographic boundaries.

- More emphasis will be placed on making editorial decisions based upon knowledge of the effects of physical elements of newspapers. The average reader looks at almost all items in the newspaper but reads only about 25 percent of them. Since each reader reads a different 25 percent, we can assess the effects of topic and physical elements to determine how newspapers are consumed and how these elements stimulate readership — i.e., use of photos, art; length and size of story; geographic significance; types of news (soft/hard); style of writing; ease of reading; location in newspaper; content environment of page, etc.
- More interest will be devoted to the newspapers' fixed-time role. Newspapers have a fixed-time role in readers' daily activities. When more time becomes available, it is not used to do more newspaper reading. However, there is no evidence that when *less* time is available newspapers will keep the same fixed time. Therefore, more emphasis will be given to assessing and reacting to the

effects of other media expansions and leisure-time activities as they may negatively or positively affect newspapers' time franchise for news and shopping.

Newspapers, I believe, will put more emphasis in the population's strength of motives to be informed.

● More interest will be devoted in reaching children as a way to develop them into future readers, recognizing that newspaper reading among children is directly related to the availability of newspapers in the home and in school. More emphasis will be placed on in-home use of newspapers to educate children.

● I believe there will be more emphasis in identifying persons according to demographic characteristics and lifestyle-behavior characteristics as predictors of newspaper readership.

● The new metropolitan statistical area changes in geographic definitions will cause newspapers to intensify interest and concern in developing their own standard area definitions lest newspapers are permanently saddled to definitions more favorable to other media.

More interest will be devoted in reaching children as a way to develop them into future readers.

Solid tips on research

Specialized content can mean general reader satisfaction

By Jenny Fielder
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

In 1981, Philip E. Meyer (then director of news and circulation research for Knight-Ridder) offered eight "solid tips" for editors based on research findings from the Newspaper Readership Project. I have reviewed NRP data since that time (plus some other research, especially from the Newspaper Advertising Bureau) to see if those tips still hold in 1983.

Meyer's eight tips are still pretty much on target, and we know even more about them now than we knew then. Studies during the past three years also suggest two more tips that can be added to Meyer's list.

Here are Meyer's original eight, plus some additional thoughts:

● **About television.** It's here to stay. Make readers depend on the newspaper for help in planning TV watching. Take a good writer with broad interests, make him a TV columnist, and give him license to write about anything he wants so long as it has a TV connection.

For years, the impulse of editors was to avoid doing anything that might encourage people to watch television. Turned out they watch it anyway. Editors can't fight television by ignoring it, but they can take advantage of the interests it arouses. As Meyer says, "Let television be the appetizer and the newspaper the main course."

Editors seem to have learned that lesson — witness the extensive coverage given *The Thorn Birds* last year. Content analyses by the Newspaper Advertising Bureau show the vast majority of newspapers cover television at least weekly and often daily. Thank goodness, since a 1982 NAB study found that 79 percent of the weekday newspaper audience "usually" reads about television. Network TV ratings may have gone down of late, but television still is a major leisure-time activity in most people's lives.

Editors are helping readers organize their TV time efficiently by telling them what's coming up and giving them a thorough and easy-to-use log. Research shows readers want that, and they also want tips about upcoming programs and specials. We need to look more extensively into the best formats for doing that, especially since the proliferation of cable has expanded tremendously the number of stations to be covered. The best way to do that, of course, is to ask the reader.

● **Specialized content draws more than general content.** When the space crunch forces a choice, save the specialities first. Keep the boat column, consumer advice, guides to local hiking trails, medical news. Trim instead the cumulative and repetitive reactions to trivia, exhaustive deliberations of public officials, etc.

Editors can't fight television by ignoring it, but they can take advantage of the interests it arouses.

What Meyer means by "draws more" needs to be clarified. There is no question that more readers are interested in world and national news, for example, than they are in guides to local hiking trails. But, as the NAB's Leo Bogart points out, "A newspaper that contained only content of maximum general interest would probably be remarkably unsuccessful, for it would fail to meet the concerns of the assorted minorities who make up its readership."

Recent research has illustrated dramatically that levels of interest in a particular category of content can be deceptive. Take educational news as an example. Based just on general interest scores, this type of news would seem to have below average appeal. But to those for whom it does have appeal — pupils, their parents and teachers — school news may be of vital concern, and an editor cannot minimize its value.

Meyer, Max McCombs of the ANPA News Research Center and others have given us a new way to think about people's interest in "various types of content. Sure, it's important to look at overall interest and readership levels, but we also need to see how those things cluster. Readership of a particular feature may be low overall, but it also could be the only or main feature that brings certain people into the paper. If such a feature were dropped, we run the risk of losing those people as frequent readers.

We need more research that uses such a clustering approach to determine what news and features have relatively low popularity but great "drawing" power. We also need to know much more about how newspapers —

> Trim the cumulative and repetitive reactions to trivia, exhaustive deliberations of public officials, etc.

cost effectively — can zone or otherwise specialize their coverage so that content of very specialized appeal can find its way to people who want it the most. Again quoting Bogart, "The challenge to editors is that of satisfying the special requirements of innumerable splinter groups of readers, while at the same time retaining the newspaper's traditional function of voicing the common concerns and interests of the entire community." We need to help them do that.

● **Newspaper as an information retrieval machine.** When a reader looks in a specific place for a specific kind of information and finds it there, he feels rewarded and will want to do it again. Make the paper more predictable. Departmentalize. Anchor. Index. Features appearing in the same place, in the same format, day after day, help the reader retrieve useful information.

Editors of one newspaper — USA Today — Certainly took this advice to heart. The good example set by that newspaper probably will do more to convince other editors of the value of such an approach than all the research numbers in anybody's computer. Just one look establishes USA Today as the best newspaper information retrieval machine around.

Research continues to flesh out the components underlying Meyer's advice. For example, a 1982 NRP study of weekday reading patterns showed that features or sections appearing on certain weekdays can be a positive reason for reading, particularly among women. But we need to keep track of how "Business Mondays" and "Science Tuesdays" are performing, both from a readership and an advertising perspective.

We need research that will help editors be smart about the sections and features we should run, with what emphasis and for how long. What works today may not work tomorrow, and we need to be able to spot "the coming thing" early on. Other industries use social trend research very effectively; newspapers need to as well.

We also need to learn from what we already know. When we see what items cluster in terms of readership, maybe those are the ones that should be anchored together. We should take a long, hard look at the NRP study entitled "The Newspaper in Readers' Minds" for clues on how readers would organize the newspapers that editors produce.

> Readership of a particular feature may be low overall, but it also could be the only or main feature that brings certain people into the paper.

A final thought: We must not forget that NRP research clearly establishes the importance of advertising to the reader, so things that are good for editorial may also be good for advertising. For example, perhaps we should consider indexing the ads. As Meyer

says, "Let's protect our readers from information overload by making it easy for them to bypass material they don't want: Your ad department won't like it, but the readers will appreciate you for it." They'll also appreciate having the kind of advertising in special sections that complements the contents of that section.

> Make the paper more predictable. Departmentalize. Anchor. Index.

● **About readers.** The 1977 NAB survey shows adults who looked at the paper at home as a child are more likely to be subscribers now. Plan newspaper content for children. Comics help, but offer material that will absorb them longer.

What does research suggest that material should be? The answer, of course, varies by the age of the child, but here are some things kids tell us they're interested in: comics, sports, puzzles and games, entertainment-related features, general news that affects them personally (the rising cost of living, for example), school/teen-age news, television and radio and personal advice columns.

Most newspapers already carry these types of content, of course, but research must help us find ways of structuring the paper so kids can find what they like and find it interesting. And research needs to be done on how best to promote the paper to kids.

One way is through newspaper-in-education projects, and the NRP in 1982 began investigating the effects of different types of NIE programs. Case studies in two cities showed that children who used newspapers all year heavily showed positive changes in newspaper reading behavior, in their attitudes toward newspapers and in their interest and knowledge of current events. Exposure for shorter periods of time was much less effective.

What we do know is that there is great variability in the way NIE programs are carried out, the kinds of training offered to teachers, the grade levels at which the newspaper is used, the kinds of classroom subjects to which it is related. What we don't know — but need to find out — is the relative effectiveness of these different approaches for hooking kids on newspapers early in life.

● **Exploit popular interest generated by other media.** People who use one medium also use the others. Give readers more information about things they have seen on TV or read about in magazines. Be aware of what other media are talking about.

Once again, more recent NRP studies have supported Meyer's advice. For example, a majority of readers interviewed in 1982 said these were "very important" reasons for reading a newspaper: "Newspapers help me to follow up on news I heard about elsewhere"; "Reading a newspaper helps me to form opinions about social and political issues," and "Reading the paper helps me to keep up with conversations with other people about what's happening."

Meyer has some more good advice: "Don't be afraid of media overkill. When a big story is breaking in all of the media and you see it everywhere you turn, you tend to get tired of it before the reader does. This is because the reader isn't paying as close attention as you are. Remember that all of these other media are building up interest which you can satisfy in your paper, so grit your teeth and keep piling it on."

● **Don't underestimate importance of national and international news.** In every Knight-Ridder market where we asked the question, people rate national and world news as more interesting than local news. Newspapers need to give continuity and form to national and international coverage, with plenty of material explaining images on TV and hard-news reports in columns.

The textbook aphorism that a cat fight on Main Street is worth a thousand riots in Afganistan is no longer true. TV brings those riots to Main Street. A dull local story is not necessarily redeemed because it is local. The world is shrinking, and the pages of the newspaper should reflect that fact.

Several important studies for the NRP have shown that the concept of "local news" has two components in most readers' conceptions: a *geographic* significance, which varied to some extent with where people lived, and a

topical dimension, which that centered on such things as politics and government or crimes and accidents.

Many respondents, when asked to define geographically their local news area, went beyond their metro region to regional and even state boundaries. Furthermore, readers define "local news" primarily by topic rather than geographic proximity. Some, for example, had rather read about education in a faraway county than business news from downtown.

So far, we've done a pretty good job of researching how interested people are in world, national, state and local news. Now we need to find out even more about what they mean when they react to those terms and how we can use that knowledge to help us edit papers that are more relevant to what people care about. The NRP certainly has pointed us toward some interesting directions.

● **Getting the paper into the home is not enough. We also have to get it read.** Nationally, on an average day, 17 percent of the people who have newspapers delivered to their homes don't read them. We know how to package street editions to make passers-by pick them up. Maybe we should do the same with home-delivered editions. Packaging news summaries on the outside of a section should help, too.

The thing we've already mentioned in tips one through six also should help. Here, the major contribution of the NRP has been to give us good, solid data on what people do with a newspaper once it gets into their homes. In those data, we've found many causes for alarm and many clues for content.

But the NRP studies also tell us that we must not forget to promote our newspapers, even to the people that are buying them already. As one study concluded in its "implications" sections, "immediate steps should be taken to counteract the view that anyone can be 'too busy' to read the daily paper. Perhaps the best way to do this would be to promote the fact that the daily newspaper provides more information on more subjects in less time, than any other medium."

We also need to know what people really mean when they tell us that they have "no time to read" or that the newspaper "costs too much." Perhaps they are saying the newspaper is not worth their time and their money. If they are, then we need to find out why. Sure, we need research to help improve content, but we also need research that will help us get across the message that reading a newspaper everyday is important and worth a person's time.

● **Occasional readers offer better opportunities than non-readers.** Readers are older, better educated and have higher incomes and job status than non-readers. Same differences are found when daily readers are compared to less frequent readers. Since we can't go far tailoring the product for those who are young, uneducated, poor and of low job status, it makes sense to concentrate on converting infrequent readers to frequent ones. Make the paper better for readers we already have, and it will be more attractive to marginal readers.

Since 1981, two major NRP studies attempted to discover ways to increase reading frequency among occasional readers.

> 'Let's protect our readers from information overload by making it easy for them to bypass material they don't want.'

The first, called "Weekday Reading Patterns," found that more regular than occasional readers said they were involved with politics and keeping up with current events. Otherwise, the interests of the two groups were quite similar. Younger adults were less likely to be five-day readers, as were those who did not get home delivery. The most frequent explanation for not reading every day had little to do with the news but something about the day itself (too busy, for example).

All in all, the research suggested that economics and market conditions are more influential than attitudes on frequency of reading. Non-content related suggestions from the NRP included widespread availability of retail outlets or racks; parity between subscription and single-copy prices; sampling the pa-

per during subscription drives, and greater budgets for promotion.

The second study, entitled "Changes in the Frequency of Newspaper Reading: Who Changes and Why?" showed that people who began reading daily papers less frequently also cut back on newsmagazines and Sunday papers. They reported having less time available to read, but they had no more responsibilities at the time they cut back than they had before.

What can editors do, according to the NRP? "If newspapers have gained more frequent readers, largely, because some people have expanded their interests in news and if newspapers have lost other readers, largely, because those readers have restricted their interests, then perhaps the single most important editorial task is a rededication to helping readers rediscover the significance of news of distant events for their own personal lives."

Bogart believes that style and presentation technique may be more important than subject matter to motivate the infrequent readers. Though their interests are not very different from those of the people who read the paper every day, they may be responsive to different ways of telling the same story. For example, the publications that turn young people on are characterized by colorful, breezy, anecdotal and often highly personalized writing style. Newspapers should cultivate good writing, interpretive writing, writing that evokes empathy and human interest.

Again, Meyer was right: "Make the paper better for readers we already have, and it will be more attractive to marginal readers." Perhaps we should add: "Promote the fact that the paper is better both to regular and marginal readers."

Demographic, Social Clues

Now, two more tips to round out a "perfect 10."

● **Look at demographic and social trends for clues about content.** Some age groups are growing more rapidly than others. Minorities are increasing faster than non-minorities. Only six of 10 American households are now headed by married couples. Increased numbers of women are working. Non-metropolitan areas are growing more rapidly than metro areas. Your readers are changing, and you must change along with them.

The NRP has looked at the reading habits and interests of minority group members, working women, the elderly and young adults. They've also looked at the impact on readership of such things as mobility and living in high-rise apartments. Editors should pay attention to these and other groups that are becoming increasingly important to our society.

> Be aware of what other media are talking about.

● **Pay attention to what the public thinks about us.** Newspapers get high marks in certain areas, but we still have problems. One-third of Americans think that reporters "often make things up," according to a Gallup poll. Only 38 percent of the public gives journalists a top rating for honesty and high ethical standards, and newspapers are perceived to be less accurate and more biased than TV and news magazines. An unfair verdict, perhaps, but we still need to take steps to increase our credibility.

We need research that traces how these and other image measurements change over time. We need to know what factors cause our image problems and how they may or may not relate to readership. Perhaps most of all, we need to know what we can do to increase our credibility among our readers and non-readers.

Toward broader news coverage

What editors need to know from readership research

By Dr. Michael Burgoon
And Dr. Judee K. Burgoon
Burgoon Co., Communications Research

What can managing editors learn from research? Here is a look at some recent findings:

● The public continues to rely heavily on newspapers for its daily news, with TV playing a complementary rather than competitive role.

Nine out of 10 adults read at least one newspaper and large numbers of people read two or more. (Two recent studies in urban locales showed that only 6 percent and 12 percent of their markets were non-readers of newspapers.)

When people are classified according to whether they predominantly depend on newspapers for news, on TV, or both, or on neither, a majority show strong reliance on newspapers and/or both media. In two recent studies, 52 percent and 62 percent of those interviewed were newspaper dominant or dual users; only one-fifth to one-fourth reported non-regular use of either news source.

Correlational analyses repeatedly reveal that those who watch more television news also consume more newspaper news and vice versa. Despite growing fears among journalists that TV is encroaching on newspaper reading habits, TV news is not competing with newspapers and may in fact be whetting the public's appetite for the more thorough coverage that newspapers supply.

Recognition of this symbiotic relationship should allay some of the fears and cynicism among journalists about the public's sophistication and the interest in news, which may affect not only story selection but writing style. It should also redirect thinking on how to cover stories that break first on television.

● Breadth and depth of non-local coverage are the first yardsticks by which the public judges its satisfaction with its newspapers.

This mandates better coverage not only of such traditional topics as national politics and world events but also such less well covered topics as science, medicine and business. Newspapers have been tardy in their recognition of these interests and the inadequacy of hard news coverage of non-local topics is reflected in low satisfaction ratings from the public (on these elements).

Breadth also implies a high story count, although not to the exclusion of adequate depth on significant issues and events. Most newspapers are poorly edited and could increase story count just through tighter editing.

Despite growing fears among journalists that TV is encroaching on newspaper reading habits, TV news is not competing with newspapers and may in fact be whetting the public's appetite for more.

Also part of this cluster of satisfaction judgments is the amount of analysis and diversity of editorial opinion that is provided. The public is demanding better understanding of the "why" of events. Newspapers are uniquely equipped to satisfy this function and should exploit this advantage over TV. But the public reports that newspapers do not excel in this area.

Overall, what is needed is a better content mix and more than a superficial treatment of complex issues and developments.

● Local news still sells newspapers, but it isn't what happens in your own back yard.

Despite increasing mobility and the weaker community ties it brings, people are still interested in local news. But what they consider local no longer matches traditional geographic definitions. Nor does it center on local government and politicians.

There is greater interest in such diverse concerns as the local economy, local business developments, educational issues and the relevance of national and international events to local residents. In fact, it is often the local angle on world and national events that makes them so compelling. Serious social issues likewise need a local perspective.

Local news also means local people coverage, not just in features on local personalities but throughout the newspaper. More photographs, names and quotations from local people in all sections of the newspaper could greatly improve the personal nature of the product.

The diversity of audiences dictates diversity of topics, approaches and writing styles.

● The biggest determinants of satisfaction with the newspaper are not demographics but elements of the product itself.

Typically, people's satisfaction with the depth and breadth of non-local coverage, with local coverage, with leisure and entertainment sections and with the sports section are the biggest predictors of their overall evaluation of the newspaper. Newspaper image often plays a role, too. Demographic differences are of secondary importance, although better educated and more affluent readers are usually less satisfied.

This means that those elements under editorial control are what determine satisfaction and, ultimately, readership. Efforts to increase satisfaction and readership are therefore better focused on the product rather than on devising strategies to better appeal to demographic subgroups.

Where major differences do exist among demographic subgroups in their reading and satisfaction, it indicates that the newspaper already has narrowed its focus to only some segments of its market and that efforts are needed to broaden its general appeal.

● There are multiple audiences for the newspaper, with varying needs and interests.

To conceive of the public as a monolith is to misunderstand the heterogeneity of readers. Reporters who write for "the reader" or newspapers who target their content to the mythical mainstream are likely to miss large numbers of potential readers.

The diversity of audiences dictates diversity of topics, approaches and writing styles. It argues for regular presentation of a wide mix of content to satisfy readers with differing informational needs and rotations of content satisfying the same audience. Low-interest items also should not be discarded because of their limited general appeal; they may be a major attraction for some audiences. Often research is needed to determine which low-interest topics can be minimized and which ones entail risk if coverage is reduced.

One approach to ensuring balance in the newspaper across a 30-day cycle is to put someone in charge of a content audit; that is, to track what topics do and do not appear in the newspaper over a month's time. The reader does not necessarily expect everything of interest to be in the paper every day but will hold it against the paper if coverage of interest areas is slender or unpredictable.

● The public judges editorial quality on the same attributes that journalists value.

Those elements that together form a judgment of quality in the public's eye are timeliness, thoroughness, accuracy, writing style, amount of analysis, interest and liveliness. The public does not want fluff; it wants hard news and useful information. And it wants it delivered in a timely, accurate, lively, well-written fashion.

Reporters and editors who assume that the

public only wants titillation or that they must "write down to the reader" may make story choices that leave the reader dissatisfied or produce a writing tone that is patronizing.

Attractiveness is also part of the quality judgment. Layout and graphics should stimulate reader interest and facilitate finding material that is desired.

> Too often research findings are not disseminated adequately to staffs or there is insufficient discussion and planning of how to implement findings.

● The biggest failure in readership research has been in the execution stage.

Too often research findings are not disseminated adequately to staffs or there is insufficient discussion and planning of how to implement findings. As much as anything, research may serve as a motivational tool, but only if management makes clear its endorsement of the results and its support for needed changes.

Likewise, there is a need for greater coordination among departments so that any changes are part of an overall unified strategy. Many journalists report an absence of any general editorial policies or perspectives at their newspaper. This often shows up in a disjointed an unpredictable product. Efforts need to be made so that values and policies held by top management filter down throughout the organization and are well understood at all levels.

Despite all the research that has been done by newspapers over the years, there are still a number of areas that need looking into. Here are some of the ones we believe would be most beneficial:

● More experimental research to determine reactions to specific writing styles, layouts and the like.

The research recently conducted by the Cincinnati Enquirer is an excellent illustration of the kind of research that can be done. Respondents to interviews were sent four prototypes to evaluate. The prototypes varied layout, graphics, story length and so on.

Reactions of respondents could then be matched to their earlier questionnaire responses to see if preferences differed by demographics or media habits. This approach can be used to test something as simple as a logo or as complex as a section remake and permits informed decision-making *before* resources are committed to major changes.

● More companion analysis of staff attitudes toward the paper and the public at the same time the public is being surveyed.

The Enquirer study also innovated in this area by having its staff complete the same questionnaire that the public completed. This permitted assessment of the staff's own evaluation of the newspaper, its own content interests and reading habits and its perceptions of the paper's strengths and weaknesses.

This source of internal feedback not only yields more ideas on where improvements can take place, it also highlights staff news biases that may be reflected in their reporting and writing. It may also uncover organizational problems that need to be addressed.

● More analysis of factors contributing to newspaper image.

Image strongly affects satisfaction and readership, yet we don't have a good understanding of why the public judges a newspaper as impersonal or uncaring or biased.

● Continued work on what content elements and what functions contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction and readership or nonreadership of the newspaper.

This is really a two-pronged suggestion.

One is to expand the list of possible predictors to include more facets of news coverage (e.g., people coverage, social issues) and more functions of the newspaper (e.g., local awareness, updating of stories) to see what role these as-yet unstudied elements play in readership and satisfaction.

The second is to continue to use statistical techniques that identify the most important contributors to satisfaction and readership. Too much research has failed to take advantage of statistical techniques that uncover important relationships among attitudes and behaviors and prioritize for the newspaper what elements first need attention.

Gut feelings, controlled change

Register Star chose a cautious approach to redesign

By Jane Amari
Managing Editor, Rockford (Ill.) Register Star

There's a certain element of gut feeling even in the most controlled change. What makes the difference is how you act on your feeling that something needs to be changed.

At the Register Star, we knew our paper needed a different look and a sense of focus. But we went about it very carefully.

A little history might be in order here. The Register Star is the child of a consolidation. In 1979, the Morning Star, a hard news oriented paper, and the afternoon Register Republic, a softer product, became the morning Register Star. Each paper had a very specific look and feel.

With consolidation, those attributes became fuzzy. The new paper was something of a mongrel, possessing a little of this and a little of that. More of the spirit of the Morning Star survived the transition, so the new product was essentially hard news with very little feature content. In fact, there was no feature section, just a "People" page that sometimes had a section front, but more often was floated about the B section.

Readership Study

After the consolidation, the paper underwrote an extensive readership study to find out how our community viewed the new us. The results were comforting, in that our readers were long-time and consistent. They thought we had solid local coverage, but, oddly enough, the one thing they wanted was more local coverage.

In 1981, the Register Star acquired a new publisher, Gary Watson. Watson had been a reporter and city editor for the paper and had grown up in Rockford. He knew the town and the product better than most.

One of his first steps was to organize brainstorming sessions with editors and staff away from the office. He asked those in attendance to describe the personality of the paper in human terms.

> More than a dozen prototypes . . . were passed around the newsroom to get editor input.

The descriptions he got were, as he puts it, "all over the map." It concerned him that the people responsible for putting the paper together had no clear idea of their goals. They did not agree on the mission of the paper or its execution. No wonder the product had little focus.

Armed with external information — the readership study — and internal information — the brainstorming sessions — Watson and executive editor Chuck Morris felt change was needed.

It was their gut feeling that the readers in asking for more local news, were really asking for more local features and a higher story count. Determined to try that conclusion on for size, the paper hired Lark Borden, an expert in graphics and feature sections, as assistant managing editor. A decision had been made to redesign the paper as well as repackage it.

Convinced that local features were the key, in the summer of 1981 Watson, Morris and Borden experimentally reshuffled the paper for three days. They pulled the People page out of the B section and made it the section front, and the Metro page, which had been 1-B, was moved to 3-A.

A box was run on the front page explaining the changes and encouraging readers to let the paper know how they liked them. In addition, a local firm was hired to do a market survey of a selection of subscribers to backstop the phone-in information.

Watson expected negative input from callers but positive feedback on the survey. Instead, the answer was uniformly positive. In addition, readers told the paper to get the obit page out of A section so one spouse could read that while the other one was catching up on the news.

Smallest Possible Paper

After the three-day trial, work began in earnest. Borden started with the smallest paper imaginable on the assumption that they are the most difficult for editors to deal with. Once the format worked on a tiny paper, it would be easy to spread it over more columns.

Borden drew up more than a dozen prototypes. They were passed around the newsroom to get editor input. Several actually were put on the press to see how they looked.

Content changes were discussed among Watson, Morris and Borden and with the rest of the staff. The food section was broadened beyond a recipe notebook to a more comprehensive approach. The today section, a feature section with a goal of 80 percent local and 50 percent live content, was planned for the B section. Entertainment coverage was beefed up. The broadsheet calendar section was converted to a tab section. A Thursday money section was designed.

> Sure it was slow. And it was controlled every step of the way.

Throughout the paper, formating was planned. The content would be packaged for the ease of the reader. To increase story count, several briefs packages — international, national, state, local, entertainment — were included. Type faces were shuffled, tried, pitched and tried again. Throughout the process, input was sought from editors as well as from experts within Gannett.

By late fall 1981, the prototypes were ready. In January, the final design was chosen. The new Register Star debuted in April.

The entire process, from deciding on the need for change through implementation, took a year. Sure it was slow. And it was controlled every step of the way.

No Shooting From Hip

One of Watson's initial concerns was that the management of the paper not shoot from the hip. As he said, "Too many bright ideas get implemented before they are completely thought out. We took it slowly on purpose. We knew it would have a major impact on the paper."

> Because of the importance of the decision, management felt it was dangerous to trust just one person's judgment.

Because of the importance of the decision, management felt it was dangerous to trust just one person's judgment. That's why so many on staff were consulted during the process.

In addition, it's just plain good management. If those who must execute it are not partners in the original concept, virtually any plan is doomed to failure.

It's been a year since the debut of the new Register Star. Reader reaction continues to be favorable. Although we continue to strive for a better paper, the framework laid down a year ago continues to work.

Perhaps a good part of the reason for its success was that it was not a gut change decreed from above, but a metamorphosis involving a large number of the staff.

A journal on journalism

Can 'Journalism Quarterly' be a useful tool for editors?

By George R. French

Journalism Quarterly: What's in it for managing editors?

On an even more basic level: What's in it?

Even more basically: What is it?

We wondered whether managing editors should bother to read scholarly, academically oriented publications like *Journalism Quarterly*? If so, what is in it for them — and their newspapers?

JQ, established in 1924, is the publication of the Association for Education in Journalism. That sets its essentially scholarly tone.

It has a circulation of a little less than 5,000 and, naturally, is published four times a year.

The dozen or so major articles in each issue all are done by unpaid free-lance writers. Based on a quick check of the authors' credentials, most of them are professors and research teams from journalism schools.

> A 'Research in Brief' section gives capsule views of research in mass communications.

The content, in general terms, is non-fiction research in mass communications. Articles are limited to 4,000 words.

A sampling of recent articles gives a clearer idea of what *JQ* is all about.

Nuts and Bolts Journalism

A glance through issues for the last few years makes it apparent that the nuts and bolts daily journalism is not a top priority.

In one article, for example, researchers at the University of Illinois re-examined primary source materials and concluded that John Milton's politics in later life did not contradict his appeal for liberty in his *Areopagitia*. Many articles, often heavily laced with footnotes and statistical charts, looked into such subjects as: the effect of the home buying "settling loop" on newspaper subscriptions; the politics of political agenda setting in the late 19th century, and factors beyond the control of a newspaper that affect circulation.

> Other articles were perhaps of general interest to managing editors, though not always directly related to the daily operation.

Other articles were perhaps of general interest to managing editors, though not always directly related to the daily operation of a newspaper.

For instance, a Northwestern University professor dug through old newspaper accounts to gather evidence that the Associated Press, contrary to its claim, may not have been the first domestic wire service. The same issue had the results of a research project aimed at finding out how much people know about the operation of newspapers and television news departments. Other general-interest subjects: reasons people watch *60 Minutes*, limitations of the press as an agent of reform, sensationalism in local television news.

Some of the articles seemed to offer some background that could help managing editors set long-term goals and standards.

In one article, Michigan State University researchers studied four newspaper markets

and described how age and income correlate with newspaper readership and satisfaction. In another, a Penn State professor took a look at the use of polls as a reporting tool. Other article subjects that might contain useful nuggets: problems caused by use of veiled attribution, demographics of supermarket-tabloid readers, readability factors in *Time* and *Newsweek*, the appeal of science news to young adults.

> In one article, researchers studied four newspaper markets and described how age and income correlate with with newspaper readership.

A few articles get down to even more practical issues. A sample: newspapers' redress against frivolous lawsuits, the effectiveness of ombudsmen, the effectiveness of mental health and marital advice columns, the response of readers to various photograph reproduction methods.

Each issue of *Journalism Quarterly* also includes several regular features. A "Research in Brief" section gives capsule views of research in mass communications. Two other sections — book reviews and abstracts of

Setting Long-Term Goals

magazine articles — provide an overview of what is being written about journalism. In one issue each year, *JQ* publishes the report of the annual convention of of the Association of Education in Journalism.

Is It Useful?

Is *Journalism Quarterly* a useful tool for managing editors? Is it even of any interest to those of us involved in the practice rather than the theory of journalism?

The answer probably depends on the individual. Are you interested journalism theory? Do you have a little extra time for scholarly reading? Can your budget stand the $16.50 annual subscription cost?

If the answers are yes, take the time to check out some of the recent issues.

Still interested? The address is *Journalism Quarterly*, School of Journalism, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701.

George R. French is a copy editor for The Evening Gazette, Worcester, Mass.

Keeping up with journalism

Survey delves into reading habits of managing editors

Are scholarly journals related to the interests of professional journalists? Specifically, where does *Journalism Quarterly* fit in the mix of professional publications read by managing editors?

To find out, Jim Files of Northern Arizona University sent questionnaires to 200 managing editors in early summer. Files, associate professor in the university's journalism department, said the mailing went to 10 percent of all daily newspaper managing editors in the United States, plus a selected group of of managing editors of papers with circulation of more than 100,000.

Besides asking about scholarly journals, Files asked about readership of general interest journalism publications, useful research topics and suggestions regarding refresher courses and seminars for professional development.

Files found that, as with most mail surveys, the response rate was low: 51 questionnaires — that is, 26 percent — were returned. That brought the sample for the survey down to 3 percent of the nation's managing editors on daily newspapers.

That response was too small for a reliable statistical sampling, Files said. He said the results did suggest, in general terms, possible areas of opportunity for planning publication content in both general interest and scholarly publications.

One thing Files' survey revealed is that managing editors simply do not read scholarly journals to any appreciable extent. They therefore are not inclined to offer suggestions regarding improvements in journal content or style.

Not surprisingly, Files found *Editor & Publisher* is the overwhelming leader among general interest publications read by managing editors, with 96 percent overall saying they read it regularly. In fact, the only circulation category where readership of *Editor & Publisher* was not 100 percent was the 10,000-24,999 circulation newspapers.

After *E&P* the unanimity dissolved. Next in readership came *Washington Journalism Review*, followed closely by *Presstime*, *Columbia Journalism Review* and *Quill*, each read by about half of the managing editors.

Profile of Respondents

One byproduct of Files' survey was a glimpse at the kind of people who are managing editors of U.S. newspapers.

Not surprisingly, Files found managing editors seem to be a well-educated group. The survey respondents overall were fairly new to their responsibilities, but generally experienced as journalists. The survey also showed the ranks of managing editors are interspersed with a growing number of women, generally in their 30s and 40s.

More specifically, most respondents overall (78 percent) were under age 45, had been in their present positions from one to four years (78 percent) and had been working journalists for 15 years or longer (59 percent). Relatively few (14 percent) indicated they had not graduated from a college or university. An equally small number (14 percent) indicated they either had a master's degree or had done advanced study beyond their bachelor's degrees. Roughly one-in-10 (12 percent) were woman.

Among those disinclined to reading scholarly journals about journalism (75 percent of the total respondent group), 82 percent said they were under age 45; 71 percent had been in their present assignments from 1-4 years, and 65 percent had been working journalists for less than 20 years. Files found 16 percent of this group hold the master's degree or have done some graduate study; 13 percent are women.

Other figures Files complied (with the caution that some do not represent enough of a sample to be statistically reliable): *Washington Journalism Review* enjoys its highest readership among MEs in the 25,000-49,000 circulation category (70 percent) and 100,000-plus category (80 percent). *Presstime* has had highest readership in the 50,000-99,999 category (83 percent) and 73 percent 100,000-plus category (73 percent). Readership of the *Columbia Journalism Review* is highest in the 25,000-49,999 category (70 percent) and 100,000-plus category (67 percent). *Quill* had its highest readership in the less-than-10,000 circulation category (57 percent). The *ASNE Newsletter*, while showing only 33 percent readership among the total group of respondents, was read regularly by 60 percent of those in the circulation category 25,000-49,999.

Most and Least Favored

Files' survey revealed that the general interest publication most favored — by its readers in the survey — was the *ASNE Newsletter*, with 53 percent of its readers calling it their favorite general interest journalism publication. Not far behind are *Washington Journalism Review* (41 percent) and *Editor & Publisher* (37 percent) — again with percentages reflecting the choices of their readers only.

> Not surprisingly, Files found *Editor & Publisher* is the overwhelming leader.

Least favored — by their readers in Files' survey — are *Quill* (33 percent), *Editor & Publisher* (33 percent) and *Columbia Journalism Review* (29 percent).

Scholarly Journals

The original thrust of Files' survey was aimed at examining ME reactions to scholarly journals and to determine the extent of readership. Files said the discovery that 75 percent of the MEs did not read *Journalism Quarterly*, while not central to the investigation in a positive manner, is revealing nevertheless.

Files found that scholarly journals about journalism, in this small sample, appear to be most popular among MEs in the 25,000-49,999 circulation category; 40 percent of those particular respondents say they read one or more journals regularly.

Even so, there appears to be an overall tendency to read scholarly journals among MEs on higher-circulation newspapers, (again, the numbers are too small for reliable generalizations). For example, readership is negligible (14-15 percent) on newspapers circulating below 25,000. Above 50,000 circulation, 32 percent of the MEs said they read scholarly journals in the 50,000-99,999 circulation category, 27 percent among MEs in the 100,000-plus category.

> Managing editors are rather vocal when it comes to identifying research topics which they believe would benefit them.

Files found *Journalism Quarterly* is read by 12 percent of the respondents, with 12 percent also identifying *Columbia Journalism Review* as a scholarly journal on their regular reading list. Six percent indicate they read the *Journal of Newspaper Research*.

Journalism Quarterly — among its readers in this survey — is most favored at the level of 67 percent. Files notes, however, that this percentage is a reflection of an extremely small sample: four out of the total six readers of *JQ*.)

Another finding: Just two respondents chose to indicate their least favored journal; one named *Journalism Quarterly* and the other named *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Research Topics

Reader interests ("marketing," as one respondent termed it) topped the list of researchable topics which MEs felt would produce information valuable to them in their jobs.

Files found that overall 47 percent named zeroing in on reader interests as a benefit of research. Interestingly, MEs in the under-10,000 category (71 percent) and in the 100,000-plus category (60 percent) were the

groups most interested in this particular subject.

In second position, with 39 percent indicating interest, was the area of management and operations. This topic was especially noted by 60 percent of the respondents in the 25,000-49,000 category and 67 percent of those responding in the 50,000-99,999 circulation group.

Only slightly lower, at 37 percent, is the mention of staff attitude and motivation research, which could easily be combined with management and operations if the specifics of language had not been so precise in the responses. Files said these answers were rather uniformly distributed across all circulation groups, as percentages within each category.

Conclusions

Files concluded from his survey that, as noted, most managing editors read one or more professional publications, but those who read scholarly publications are in the minority.

Managing editors are rather vocal when it comes to identifying research topics which they believe would benefit them personally and benefit journalism generally, Files said.

This suggests to Files that there is a "topical agenda of concerns" of managing editors and newspapers in general. If that need is served by scholarly investigation, Files speculated, it would enhance considerably the usefulness — and readership — of the several journals among a managing editor audience.

> Readership of scholarly publications seems to be a function of circulation size.

Readership of scholarly publications seems to be a function of circulation size, if generalizations can be drawn from the limited response.

Other than the finding that scholarly journals obviously hold little attraction for managing editors, Files said, perhaps the most significant finding of the survey is the identification of areas of concern where research — if done and reported in journalism journals — might benefit managing editors personally and professionally.

APME

Chairman

Diane Benison
The Evening Gazette
20 Franklin St.
Worcester, Mass. 01613

Vice Chairmen

John Focht
Alton Telegraph
111 E. Broadway
Alton, Ill. 62002

William Heath
Marshfield News-Herald
111 W. Third St.
Marshfield, Wis. 54449

Committee Members

Jane Amari
Rochford Register Star
Rochford, Ill. 61105

Tom Curley
Norwich Bulletin
Norwich, Conn. 06360

Stan Felder
Prince George's Journal
Lanham, Md. 20706

Jim Files
CU Box 6001
Journalism Department
Northern Arizona Unversity
Flagstaff, Ariz. 86011

Alfred Hamilton Jr.
Greensboro Record
Greensboro, N.C. 27420

Bernie Hornick
Samson Independent
Clinton, N.C. 28328

Richard Hughes
Home News
New Brunswick, N.J. 08903

Beverly Kees
Grand Forks Herald
Grand Forks, N.D. 58201

Katherine Moore
Gannett Newspapers
Rochester, N.Y. 14604

Peter Thompson
The Oregonian
Portland, Ore. 97201

Pete Weitzel
Miami Herald
Miami, Fla. 33101

This report was produced at The Evening Gazette (Worcester, Mass.) under the supervision of George R. French with help from Russ Donnelly, Bob Palumbo and Mary Owanesian.